

THE MANILA TIMES

How the US maneuvered to put Cory Aquino in power

By [RIGOBERTO D. TIGLAO](#) on December 19, 2016 [Opinion on Page One](#)



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As narrated by a participant, Reagan personal envoy Laxalt

PRESIDENT Duterte's disdain for the United States, and his pronouncements that he will lead the country towards a "separation" from its colonial and post-colonial master, is undoubtedly fraught with real danger. Except for Fidel Castro who died aged 90 and Mao Zedong at 82, it's difficult to think of any leader of any Third World country who defied the US and remained in power, or in life for so long.

I don't think I'm caught up in some conspiracy theory to say that the US Central Intelligence Agency, with its very reliable partners, the Israeli Mossad and the Korean Central Intelligence Agency, is still the most powerful organization in the world with cross-border power.

Maybe I've watched too many Jason Bourne movies, but since August 21, 1983, I have been amazed at the precision of the gunman who fired the single bullet that killed Ninoy Aquino. And that was done in the five seconds after Aquino left the plane. Can any Filipino assassin be so good?

Aquino's assassination in 1983 did fire up outrage against the Marcos dictatorship, with his funeral procession estimated to have been attended by at least a million people. However, it didn't actually trigger the events that led to EDSA I in 1986. That it did is a myth.

It was the brilliant maneuverings by the US that toppled Marcos, which the Yellow Narrative, propagated by the two Aquino presidents and President Fidel V. Ramos, has cloaked.

Perhaps, if anything else, Duterte's anti-US stance would bring America's role in our sad plight as a nation without control of our destiny, how it brought the Yellow Cult to power, to light.



MAMA MARY OR MR. REAGAN? Statue of the Virgin Mary onstage with Enrile and Ramos during EDSA I.

Marcos weathered the political storm of the Aquino assassination. The findings of the "Agrava Commission," the independent body that was created to investigate it, cleared General Fabian Ver of complicity in the assassination. It had the effect of giving the elite an excuse to continue its support for Marcos, and "move on."

More importantly, Marcos bought the Philippine elite's support at that time by giving them the means not only to survive the severe 1984-1985 economic crisis, but to grow richer.

That economic conflagration was the worst ever in our history, part of the global debt crisis triggered by the Mexican default on its foreign loans in March 1982. With the ensuing rise of global interest rates, the Philippines also defaulted on its loans in October 1983, which in effect barred the country from receiving any foreign exchange for its exports of goods and services. The Philippines was effectively isolated from the world

business community. As a result, the economy shrank by 20 percent from 1983 to 1985 percent, the deepest such contraction in the post-war period.

Elite richer

The Philippine elite though was protected from the economic meltdown, to a great extent through the Marcos' regime's so-called "Jobo bills," named after the banker Jose B. Fernandez, Jr. who replaced Marcos and Imelda's favorite official Jaime Laya as central bank governor in 1983. Jobo broke all monetary-policy precedents and had the central bank and the National Treasury issue these bills, which had unheard-of interest rates that steadily went up to as high as 60 percent in mid-1985.

The economic crisis from 1983 to 1985 reduced average Filipinos' income (measured as per capita GNP) by a staggering 20 percent—which meant that it was only 21 years later, in 2003, that GDP per capita exceeded that of 1983.

In contrast, the Filipino elite in effect saw their funds grow 40 percent richer by investing in the Jobo bills.

The central bank economists, especially the two-term central bank governor Amando Tetangco who was at that time deputy director for economic research, justified the bills as necessary to contain inflation.

Which in fact it did. Reaching a high of, believe it or not, 80 percent in mid-1984, inflation fast receded, to end up only 10 percent by the end of 1985. The rich were happy as they were much richer, ordinary Filipinos even became relieved that prices of commodities which had rocketed in 1984 returned nearly back to normal.

Marcos seemed to have recovered from his kidney transplant by 1984, and succeeded in stabilizing the economy and the political situation. The International Monetary Fund in 1985 gave the country a financial parachute in the form of a \$300 million loan, called an extended facility, and got foreign bankers and governments not only to agree to a restructuring of the Philippines' debt to them, but to extend a new \$200 million loan so it could service its maturing debts.

Marcos' plan for a transition from a formal dictatorship to a de facto one mimicking Lew Kuan Yew's 31-year one-man rule in Singapore was making headway: the Parliament (Batasan Pambansa) which had 180 members, 55 of whom made up the opposition, convened in June 1984 and elected Marcos' chief technocrat Cesar Virata Prime Minister.

By that move, Marcos sent a message to the world that there was a clear line of succession, Virata, and Imelda wouldn't be his political heir.

By this time though, the US State and Defense Departments had decided that Marcos had to be toppled, despite President Reagan and his wife Nancy's fondness and strong support for the Marcos couple.

Reagan, a fierce anti-communist, was said to have been convinced by mid-1985 to abandon Marcos when told by the CIA that the growth of the communist insurgency, which was based on its propaganda that it was fighting for democracy and against dictatorship, could only be stopped if the dictator was overthrown and “democracy restored”. If the communists with their allies captured power, the CIA had argued, the US military bases in Clark and Subic would be booted out, endangering Reagan’s crusade against “The Evil Empire,” the USSR. That of course made Reagan, obsessed with destroying the Soviet Union, change his mind instantly.

Marcos survived the 1983 Aquino assassination. He would fall though three years later because of events triggered by a brilliant US move, which Reagan saw through to the end.: It forced Marcos to call for a “snap” elections, which the Constitution didn’t require, the conduct of which triggered the events that led to his fall.

Here is how the US executed that move, as narrated by Reagan’s personal envoy Senator Paul Laxalt, in the Summer 1986 issue of the conservative magazine Policy Review. It wasn’t Mama Mary that created events that led to the dictator’s downfall, but Mr. Reagan.

In his article, Laxalt described in detail how he relayed to Marcos Reagan’s wish for Marcos to undertake “credible” elections to prove that he still had Filipinos’ support, an idea which was, to quote the senator, “previously broached to him by CIA director William Casey.” Laxalt even told Marcos in mid-1985 that the announcement for such an elections could be dramatically made in his scheduled interview in the popular TV talk show then, This Week with David Brinkley. Marcos did make the announcement, which surprised the country, on November 4, when interviewed by Sam Donaldson and George Will in that show.

I don’t think US officials weren’t aware of the consequences of that election.

Laxalt’s account

The rest is history, to use that cliché: it was the widespread perception of fraud in the elections, real or not, the RAM’s failed coup attempt, Marcos’ hesitation in wiping out militarily the Enrile-Ramos’ gang of 700 rebels in Camp Crame that led to the dictator’s fall.

It is spine-tingling though to read Laxalt’s account, how matter-of-factly he narrated how Marcos was made to step down from power:

“On Feb. 24, President Marcos phoned me at the Capital, where I was being briefed by Secretary of State George Schultz and Philip Habib, the President’s special emissary, about the latest events in the Philippines. Marcos asked me whether a message he had received from the White House calling for a “peaceful transition to a new government was genuinely from President Reagan. I told him it was.... President Marcos was terrified by reports that the US Marines were on the way to join the rebels...

After this phone call [from Marcos at 3 a.m. February 25], Secretary Shultz and I were driven to the White House, where we met with the President, Admiral Pointdexter, the national security adviser, and White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan. The President said it would be impractical and undignified for Mr. Marcos to share power with Mrs. Aquino...

I then called President Marcos from Admiral Pointdexter's office in the White House. It was 5 a.m., Manila time...President Marcos asked me the gut question—what I thought he should do...I concluded that it was in the best interest of all that he leave. If he did not, I feared a civil war with a lot of bloodshed. I said, 'Cut and cut cleanly. The time has come.' x x x

We have talked a few times since he came to Hawaii...It's important to understand too that (Marcos) didn't believe he was going to have to leave the country when he agreed to leave the presidential palace. He thought he was going home to northern Luzon. Otherwise, he told me, 'I would have never taken all that currency out of there. That was a violation of our law. I thought I was going home.'

Apparently, negotiations to permit the Marcoses to go home were still under way when their entourage was flown into Clark Air Field from the presidential palace...Mrs. Aquino and more particularly General Ramos feared he would be a very bad force if he stayed in the Philippines, and so the Marcoses were taken to Guam. "

The US made the crucial move that would lead to Aquino's capture of power in 1986. EDSA I provided the dramatics with RAM, Enrile, Ramos, and Cardinal Sin the supporting characters of the drama. The US even helped Cory's propaganda by deploying several PR firms to help her, among them, the Sawyer-Miller Group.* (That firm brainstormed the Yellow color as the Aquinos' protest symbol, extracted from that very American "Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Ole Oak Tree" 1973 hit song, derived from a tale during the US Civil War.)

The US also saved Cory from being overthrown by military mutineers in November 1989. I'll quote the account of then US Armed Forces Chief of Staff Collin Powell, who supervised that rescue, in my column Wednesday. To paraphrase Quezon, I would prefer a hell of a destiny made by Filipinos, rather than a heaven of a destiny made by the US government.

I wonder what role the US had in reinstalling another yellow regime in 2010.

* For a detailed, documented account, see my column November 29, 2015. ["Smartmatic chairman: Cory's close-in media adviser."](#)